

Becoming knowledgeable about nature

Story and photos by **LYNSI BURTON**
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Program seeks to teach children about environment

MOUNT VERNON — On a drizzly midwinter afternoon, children with the Kulshan Creek Kids program found signs of spring during their nature walk on the Kulshan Creek Trail: the harmony of a warbler's song, light green leaf buds sprouting from trees.

As National Park Service interpreter Andrew Pringle noted, the grass would be greener soon and different birds will appear and be heard in the coming months.

"You can pay attention and be a scientist just noticing these changes over a long period of time," Pringle told the kids, who paged through bird identification books.

Saturday's excursion through the neighborhood wetland area near Bakerview Park was one of the Kulshan Creek Kids program's monthly events.

Together with the North Cascades Institute, National Forest Service, Mount Vernon Police Department, Skagit Youth and Family Services and the National Park Service, each month's activity aims to teach low-income kids about their local environment and engage in Skagit's natural settings.

With the morning bringing rain, the 25 children spent most of those early hours inside the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Station at the corner of North 26th Street and Kulshan Avenue, playing games and watching a video on the effects climate change has on the North Cascades National Park.

When asked whether they knew about climate change at the beginning of the day, none of the kids raised their hands.

An hour or two later, they could talk about greenhouse gases and glacier movement.

When the rain cleared up and pockets of blue sky poked



ABOVE: National Park Service interpreter Andrew Pringle (left) invites Andrea Pantoja, 11, to touch a cattail during a nature walk Saturday on the Kulshan Creek Trail in Mount Vernon with the Kulshan Creek Kids program.

TOP: Volunteer Sarah Detzer (right) looks at a book of plant species with Ximena Becerra, 7, during a nature walk Saturday.

through the clouds, the children took a stroll along the nearby Kulshan Creek Trail, which runs parallel to East Fir Street to the south and East College Way to the north.

Sarah Detzer, a Kulshan Creek Kids volunteer representing Catholic Housing Services, said that the children who attend the monthly field trips, which include river rafting and eagle watching outings, learn about how the environment evolves during the year.

"They're, over time, kind of observing this whole big picture and the seasons," said Detzer, who looked at birding books with some of the kids as they walked.

Marisol Martinez, 11, said she learned about the causes of climate change and how it has

shrunk glaciers.

Is she worried?

"No, it's basically just normal," she said, adding, "The only thing I'm scared of is animals losing their homes."

Pringle beckoned the children to touch cattails — which Marisol said was "gross" — and listen to birds.

Later, they took leaves and sticks and cattails back to the neighborhood station to paint on a poster.

Pringle emphasized that while the field trips to Padilla Bay and Marblemount are fun, nature can be explored right in their backyards.

"Right here where you guys live in Mount Vernon, you guys are pretty lucky," he said.

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